

The Network 2 Website Building a Communications Bridge



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Abstract:

The Network 2 Website is building a communications bridge to integrate communications and access to resources across geographically distant multiple care sites. With the evolution of web based applications, technology is utilized to enhance communication-both within the organization and also with our external customers and stakeholders. This session will provide highlights of this best practice website and provide an overview of lessons learned in web development.

Introduction:

The award-winning VISN2 website has evolved over the past 2 years from an initial framework of Medical Center listings to a dynamic customer-driven network interface that provides enhanced access to information and resources to both employees and veterans. The website development program began as an Intranet site, but was expanded to the Internet in January 1998. Having grown to over 1200 pages, the sites reflect the Network's philosophy of continuous quality improvement with the veteran patient as the focal point of the Network 2 Model of Care.

Internet: <http://www.va.gov/visns/visn02/>

Intranet: <http://vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/>



A Resource for Veterans

Identified as a best practice, the VISN2 website features both detailed network and facility information applicable to Upstate New York veterans, as well as information, tools, and resources of interest to the global community of veterans, attracting visitors from as far away as Italy, Jordan, and Germany. Content such as the **Online Enrollment Guide and Veterans Services** address fundamental customer needs, while a **Customer Service Quickcard** form invites users to provide feedback about the quality of services received at Network 2 Facilities. A **Community Calendar** enhances access to community outreach events across the Network, and the **Virtual Help Desk** delivers innovative customer Service by linking VA professionals to customers worldwide via electronic mail. Internet technology and electronic interaction provide an alternate communication channel to a patient population who is increasingly turning to the Internet for information and communication.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned over a year of customer interaction and feedback, have been incorporated into website development strategies, as demonstrated by content such as **Electronic Enrollment** and **Veteran Services: Frequently Asked Questions**. FAQ's are derived from Virtual Help Desk submissions and other patient communications, which provide an opportunity to learn more about the informational needs of our customers and stakeholders, as well as needed enhancements of programs and services. Network 2 is currently piloting an innovative Internet Access Program which has placed 19 computers, excessed from necessary system upgrades, at Veteran Service Organizations selected through the Management Assistance Council, enhancing access to Network 2 information and resources across the patient service area. Training was provided to representatives from each organization, and the program has helped to build new relationships in the community.

A Resource for Employees

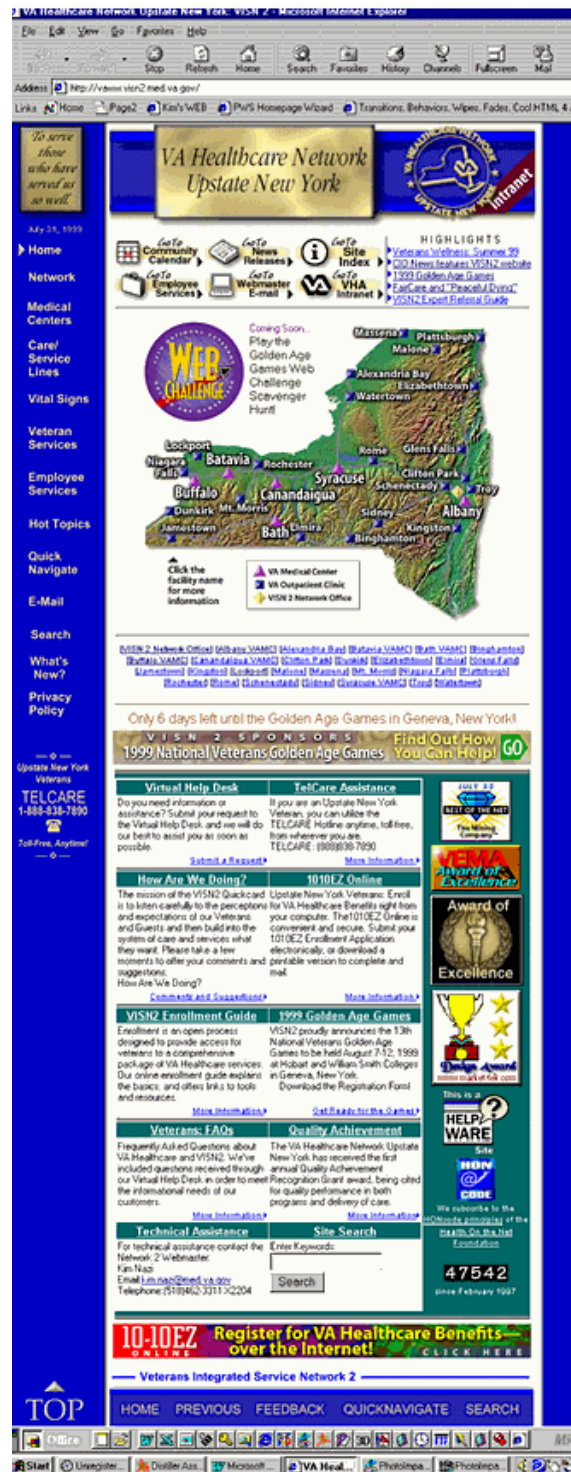
An NT Server running MS IIS 4.0 hosts the VISN2 Intranet at <http://vaww.visn2.med.va.gov>. The online **Network 2 Business Plan** and **WebTop 2.0 Interface** exemplify the commitment to providing employees with easy access to important information. An online **Employee Suggestion Form** complements an Employee Suggestion Program which champions the Network strategy of cultivating an empowered workforce where delegation of responsibility and authority matches skill levels, and customer/labor/management partnerships are reinforced. Intranet applications such as online **Computer System Access Request forms** streamline communication and provide additional opportunities for security, standardization, documentation and tracking.

Website Development Strategies and Tips

1. Understand the organizational vision.

The Network 2 Director and Chief Information Officer offer support, depth, and vision to the website development program. By exploring the organization's culture and strategies, the website provides a cohesive interface that interprets and reflects the overall organizational vision. Management support of the program is critical to its success.

- To foster management support of the project, begin with a written plan and clear objectives including benefits and projected impact. Also find out what the organizational management's vision is of the audience and potential impact.
- Participate in strategic planning and organizational councils and committees in order to fully understand the culture, goals, and values of the organization.
- Include the organizations mission, vision, and values in the development of website content in order to clearly communicate these underlying themes
- Create effective processes for communicating progress, and new content. This is especially important in this era of information overload.



2. Think Globally.

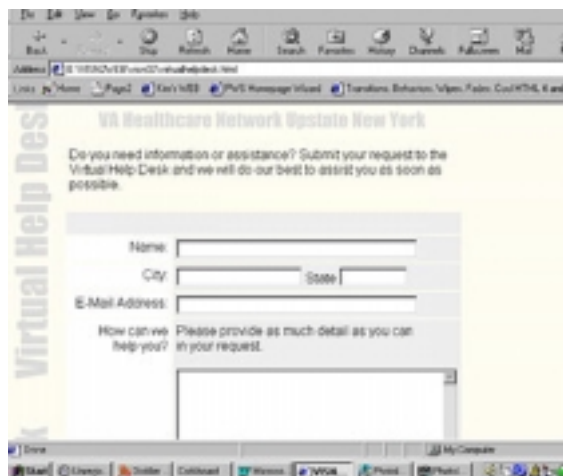
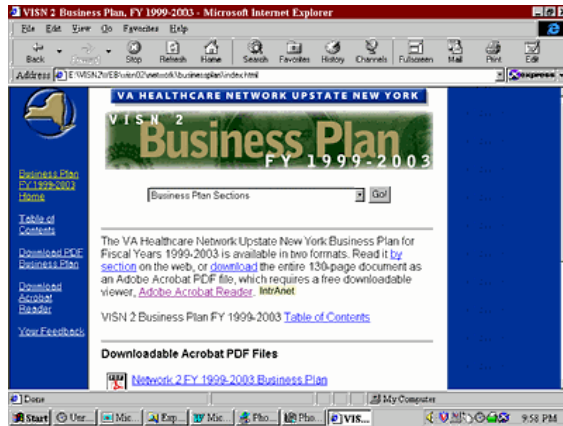
The Internet enables us to overcome traditional barriers of time and distance. It is increasingly important to improve the on demand accessibility of selected on-line clinical and business information to employees in geographically disparate locations, and to the global community of veterans.

- Utilize the on-demand accessibility of the intranet/internet for distributing information, tools, and resources to both employees and customers. For example, the 1010EZ online application for Medical Benefits is available to veterans 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, not just during "normal business hours."
- The Virtual Help Desk program is available to a global community of veterans around the clock, and has responded to requests for information and assistance from as far away as Italy, Germany, and Israel.

3. Employ Project-driven Strategies.

Content is the heart of website development. By encouraging employees to participate in the development of content areas within their area of expertise you will foster quality, creativity and enthusiasm.

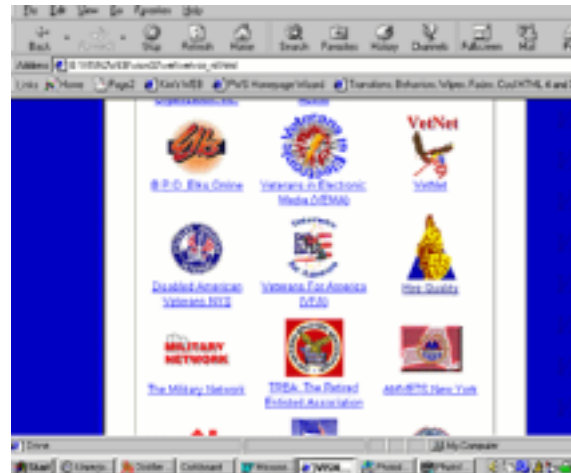
- Create an open atmosphere for employees and veterans to suggest and participate in content creation and the development of new projects.



4. Develop Strong Partnerships.

Both within and outside the organization, these relationships add an increased sensitivity to the true needs of users, both employees and veterans. By providing website demonstrations and presentations to Veteran Service Organizations, a clear sense of user needs was established, as well as the enhanced awareness of available tools and resources.

- Accept invitations to present website information at veteran service organization meetings and events, as well as employee forums and meetings.
- Ask your audience on a regular basis what new information and resources would be of value to them.



5. Communicate in More than One Medium.

A cohesive communication strategy integrates multiple media for maximum impact. Print newsletters provide dynamic content and benefit from enhanced distribution online. Email is used to distribute Websights-a monthly website progress report, which is sent to all VISN2 Employees and also available to online subscribers externally.

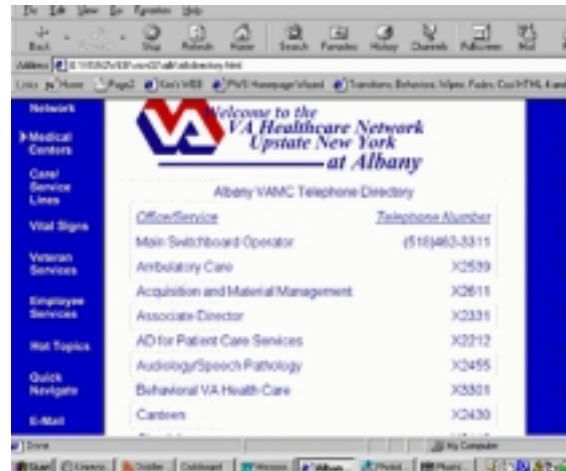
- Complement online content with print media to reach a broader audience, Ex. WEBSIGHTS
- Utilize print content such as newsletters, for translation online.
- Evangelize!



6. Maintain the Quality of Existing Content as you Move Forward with New Content Development.

The quality of a website is contingent upon the timeliness and accuracy of the information provided. At VISN2 we are committed to maintaining the quality and appropriateness of existing content, as new content development continues.

- Establish content ownership of information areas in order to ensure that the information is regularly revised and updated.
- Encourage groups to develop action plans for how the information will get reviewed on a regular basis.



GEC Website Development Plan MVAC Website Action Plan

7. Always Remember your Mission.

Technology grows exponentially. Keeping the focus on service to veterans and empowerment of employees helps to prioritize development projects and ensure that technology is an enhancement, rather than the sole driver.

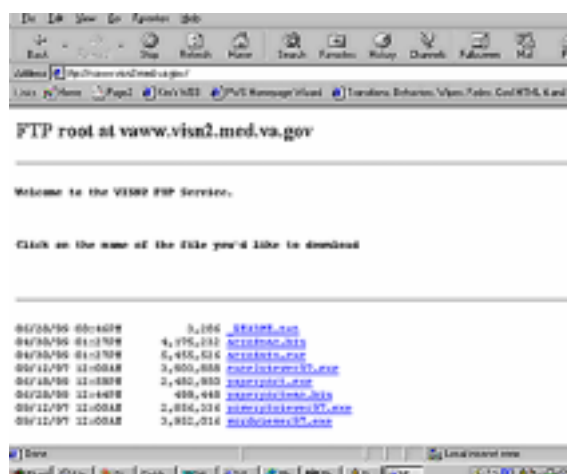
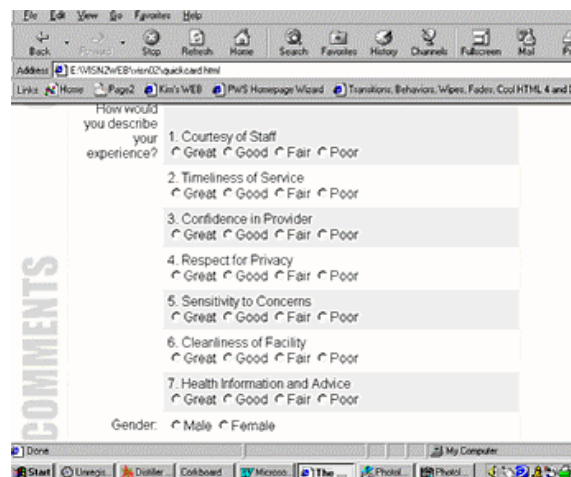
- New projects must inherently provide enhanced benefit to users.
- Identify current processes and diagram potential improvements before implementing the technology piece. Example-online consults.
- Look at the big picture and ensure that web development projects complement development projects in other areas.
- The movement towards utilizing the technology driven solution must also take into account the level of access and skills needed to utilize the resource.



8. Utilize your technology infrastructure to enhance services.

Technology offers the potential of enhancing access to existing programs and services, as well as developing new and creative programs and projects.

- FTP service offers fast access to helper applications. Example-The Visioneer Paperport Viewer was made available after a user suggested that many employees needed this program to view scan documents shared via email.
- Behavioral Health Discussion Boards were instituted to create private discussion areas, organized by topic. This proved to be an enhancement to email discussions, which were difficult to follow with many users and multiple topics.
- Index Server provides keyword searching of Medical Center Memorandums and Network policies in native MS word.doc format, enhancing accessibility to critical documents.



Web Development Resources

- **HTML Goodies** [<http://www.htmlgoodies.com/>]
A wealth of information in a user friendly format from Dr. Joseph Burns, including tutorials, tips, and primers.
- **Builder.com** [<http://www.builder.com/>]
CNET's resources for site builders, including cool tools, scripting tutorials, editorials, and product reviews.
- **DevHead** [<http://www.zdnet.com/devhead/>]
ZDNet provides everything you need to know about web development in one place, with demos and examples for download.
- **WebCoder** [<http://www.webcoder.com/>]
A good resource for JavaScript and dynamic html.
- **WebReview** [<http://webreview.com/wr/pub>]
"Cross-Training for Web teams"
- **WebMonkey** [<http://www.hotwired.com/webmonkey/>]
Hot Wired's creative approach to web design.
- **Webmaster Resources** [<http://www.webmaster-resources.com/>]
Articles about web design, as well as tools and resources.
- **Virtual Promote** [<http://virtualpromote.com/>]
Devoted to the art of promoting your site.
- **Site Launch** [<http://www.sitelaunch.net/>]
Site promotion and much more, including cool tools, traffic builders, articles on style and design, etc.
- **Useit.com** [<http://www.useit.com/>]
From usability expert Jakob Nielsen, information about web design and user interfaces.
- **Web Developer's Virtual Library** [<http://stars.com/>]
Illustrated encyclopedia of web technology with tutorials, examples, and links.
- **WebDeveloper.com** [<http://www.webdeveloper.com/>]
Information , tools, and resources related to web development.